

Child and Family Services Update

Monday, January 14, 2002

A Call For Unity

By Richard Anderson

I cannot think of a better time for me to send a message that has been on my mind for some time. It is a call for all of us to work more closely together to build a division of trust and support for each other, for the children and families, and with our community partners. We need to continue to show that the division has a unified message and a practice that really does represent the citizens of the state. We must show that each one of us is committed to the continuing enhancements that we started a couple of years ago. We are stronger in our positive impact when we are unified in philosophy and in approach. At the same time, we are open to improvements and will respond as public servants to what is asked of us by those who represent all of us as citizens. All of this results in increasing respect from the communities we serve, more dependable services to children and families, and more trusting relationships in our close professional partnerships.

We can all demonstrate in our actions and in our speech that we are compassionate, that we protect children, and that we support nurturing and safe family life. I believe that this is what citizens can expect when they come in contact with Child and Family Services. Compassion does not rule out justice--it must include it. Protection does not rule out partnerships with families--it requires it. Nurturing and safe family life does not rule out mistakes--it requires, rather, that all of us learn from those mistakes.

As your director, I need to be able to make guarantees to the governor, the legislature, and to all the communities in which we work, that the model we are implementing is supported by everyone in the division. We need to continue work to improve it, but fundamentally we all must engage effectively, assess thoroughly, team consistently, use planning in unique ways to fit each child and each family, and intervene in the most advantageous ways that will lead toward the most positive outcomes.

I am grateful to all of you for being willing to make the adjustments that improve our services. If we send clear signals by the way we work, then we can improve our communications with those who want to help us improve, and receive better direction and support when course alterations are necessary. We need to be confident that we are all providing a consistent philosophy and practice (the Practice Model) in the important and fundamental work of Child and Family Services. We have done well. We need to constantly strive to do even better. I believe in you and am honored to be on your team!

OUCH! (OR, “Working For The State Is Like Riding A Roller Coaster!”)

By Richard Anderson

I'm sure most of you have been watching the news lately. If the current direction of the legislature continues, it is true that we could lose an additional 26 positions in Child and Family Services and each of us may be required to take one day of non-paid leave during the next five months (this unpaid furlough would be the same for all state employees). The 26 positions must be annualized, meaning that the annual cost of 26 positions would have to be saved over the next five months.

Yes, the budget of the division is caught up in the same confusion as the rest of the state budget. You have probably read or listened to the debates over how to adjust the budget for this fiscal year, ending June 30, 2002. The governor has already taken the cuts that he thinks are manageable in order to balance the budgets through the rest of this year. His proposal included using some rainy day funds and some highway funds. This still required cuts to our budget--the main cut was 14 division unfilled positions. We did not have to freeze hiring or have anyone lose a job. We planned to slowly move these additional positions out to the regions over the year. We were being cautious so that we were sure that we could afford all of the positions. We did not want to go through another year like two years ago. You may remember that back then we trimmed over 80 staff from the division in about six months, and we have still not been able to build back what we lost. The events of 9/11 created a whole new budget atmosphere for our country, as well as our state.

Now, the legislature is in session attempting to balance the budget without touching the rainy day fund or the highway fund. This would mean deeper cuts in state government. The legislative analyst's budget proposal for our division has another 26 positions that would have to be unfilled for the entire year. This could mean about 43 positions that would have to go vacant from February through June. We are working on what we can expect in turnover creating vacancies during that time frame to see how many positions would have to be vacated during the five months.

I know you must be thinking what I am thinking, “How can we do all we have been asked to do in the Milestone Plan if we have fewer people to accomplish this commitment?” I have presented this dilemma to our legislators. The truth is that we cannot take this kind of cut and continue to meet our obligations. There would have to be decreased expectations and decreased tasks for everyone in the division.

I know that there are legislators who realize that there cannot be deeper cuts, especially in our services. Maybe there are some who could be appealed to, who might go to our defense if they really understood our situation. The debates are not over yet. Keep focused on our goals and I will keep you posted as to what I hear on the budget and other legislative proposals.

What Is Happening To The Legislative Bills That Impact Our Work?

By Richard Anderson

You received a listing of the bills that we knew about as of the last “Update” articles. Here is what has happened to a few of them to date.

H.B. 204--We have only had one bill discussed in interim committees. This is House Bill 204. This bill changes the statute to read that “As directed by the division, the attorney general shall enforce all provisions of this chapter, in addition to the requirements of Title 78, Chapter 3a, *Juvenile Court Act of 1996*, relating protection and custody of abused, neglected, or dependent *minors*. (Italics and underline show the changes.) The bill has passed the interim committee and was sent to the rules committee. The Attorney General continues to work on the bill to propose changes that may end up with more of a middle ground.

“Warrants Bill”--We are meeting with Representative Hatch tomorrow to discuss what has been called the “Warrants Bill.” This bill has not yet been numbered, so it has not been presented. Our concern with this bill is that it attempts to solve a problem we do not have. We have been requested by Representative Throckmorton to offer changes in the language of the bill.

S.B. 17--This is Senator Buttar’s bill on changing the database requirements. This bill has been amended. We are now reviewing the substitute bill. The bill is not yet on the calendar for presentation. This is a very expensive bill. We have offered alternatives to the original proposal that would be less costly and still allow for increased objectivity and fairness.

On-Call Memo

By Richard Anderson

Many of you may have seen the recent memo regarding on-call and excess time reporting. A change, especially a change that may negatively affect how we have been paid, is not easy to send let alone accept. The Department found itself in violation of state Human Resource Policy and, in some cases, violating contracts signed by employees. We are trying to standardize the practices within Child and Family Services and keep within the law. The Department is also taking action to correct processes within other divisions.

We appreciate those of you who are willing to accept on-call assignments and recognize it is not always easy or convenient. Although on-call is a condition of employment, neither the Region Directors nor I want to move from a voluntary system. We recognize there may be times when you will be asked to assume an assignment when it may not be the best time for you. I am thankful to be associated with an organization whose staff is willing to sacrifice to protect children who may be abused.

If you have concerns regarding how the directive in the memo may affect you, please discuss it with your supervisor. If concerns cannot be resolved in the region, please feel free to contact me or staff in the Office of Human Resources.

To Make Your Life Easier...Using SAFE Optimally

By Robert Lewis

Changes In Who Can Create Client Identifiers

We have been forced to put some limitations in SAFE as to who can create new client identifiers (High Level Client Index numbers, sometimes called O-numbers), to insure that careful searches for pre-existing and duplicate records be made before deciding to create a new client identity.

There is a long-standing problem in State human service systems (SAFE, USSDS, PACMIS, and ORSIS) of clients having multiple system records and identifiers. This leads to many problems in payments, reporting, coordination, under-collection of federal funds, etc. The division has been identified as the cause for many of these problems. As of December 11, 2001, there were 117,953 potentially duplicate person records when searching on first and last names in SAFE. Release 2.400 will include some changes:

- The ability to create new O-numbers will become a special, limited access capability.
- A limited number of persons ("Client Record Integrity Specialists") will be trained on the standards for searching for and merging duplicates and will be given the right to create new O-numbers.

We know this new arrangement is going to create some difficulties for CPS workers. This is because they will now have to depend on someone else to create O-numbers for victims and perpetrators, when this is needed, in order to close substantiated cases.

To avoid delays in closing CPS cases, each office will need to set up new procedures for getting O-numbers for persons in CPS cases. Here are two possibilities:

- Establish a process where CPS workers give the new Client Record Integrity Specialist workers a few days advance notice that they will need identifiers for certain persons; or
- Have the Client Record Integrity Specialist worker routinely do a search of new CPS cases to fix duplicates and create new O-numbers where needed.

Steps for the Client Record Integrity Specialist to do the latter may be:

- On a weekly basis, call up the SAFE Case List window showing all currently open CPS cases for the worker/team/office.
- Select the "All clients" view, and either:
 - Use this list to identify persons who lack a Client ID (O-number). **[NOTE: This is the minimal level.]**

- Sort by case start date, and focus on persons in new cases regardless of whether or not they have an O-number. **[NOTE: This approach will be the most effective in reducing duplicates.]**
- Do the required searches in SAFE and mainframe systems to see what records currently exist for the person/client.
- If duplicate records exist for the person, follow procedures to decide which record and its identifier should be used for the person on the CPS case, make this SAFE change, and then get rid of the duplication by making arrangements to or performing a merge of the duplicate records into the preferred record.
- If no existing person/client record exists in any of these systems, create a new Client ID (O-number) for the person.